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ABSTRACT

In 1984, a project was initiated in Asia under the sponsorship of the Asia Pacific Broadcasting Union that represents a major break-through in achieving a better balance in the collection, editing, and distribution of the world's news. This break-through was the Asiavision Satellite News Exchange, which has made it possible for many Asian countries--i.e., Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, Sri Lanka, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Iran, to exchange local and regionally collected television news on a daily basis. News directors come together by means of satellite linkages for morning editorial teleconferences to decide which of the day's local news stories will be forwarded from each country to a coordinating center where the collected items are packaged and redistributed for inclusion in evening newscasts of participating countries. Because they lacked the resources to maintain their own correspondents abroad, developing countries had traditionally looked to major news centers who collected and redistributed news for the rest of the world, but this is no longer the case. By creating networks of cooperation, based on self-reliance and mutual assistance, these Asian countries are discovering that rather than being passive consumers, they can be active contributors to the world's news. (CGD)

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TELEVISION NEWS EXCHANGES IN ASIA

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TELEVISION NEWS EXCHANGES IN ASIA

Noone in international television, certainly noone in international news, will be unfamiliar with the 1980 McBride Report "Many Voices, One World." The McBride Report postulates that the principal causes of the imbalance in news flow among the nations of the world are: lack of facilities, lack of training, lack of funds, and lack of coordinating structures.

In 1984, under sponsorship of the Asia Pacific Broadcasting Union, a project was initiated in Asia which represented a major break-through in achieving a better balance in the collection, editing, and distribution of the world's news. This break-through was the Asiavision Satellite News Exchange.

The result is that Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, Sri Lanka, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Iran, all members of an Intelsat-based visual news network, are exchanging local and regionally-collected television news on a daily basis, sometimes twice daily.

News directors now come together, by means of satellite linkages, for morning editorial teleconferences to decide which of the day's local news stories will be forwarded from each country to a coordinating center in Kuala Lumpur. There the collected items are packaged and redistributed for inclusion in evening newscasts of participating countries.

Following the principle of "free to offer, free to receive or to refuse," news content is always within the control of participants. Members are expected not to use the Asiavision channel for propaganda purposes. In practice, news items

exchanged are mostly soft news and human interest stories, not especially prepared but drawn from the national services, usually from telecasts of the day before.

Some stories, such as the Bophal disaster in India, are transmitted unedited to member newsrooms and appear in Asian households before they reach the West. All this is of course a big change from past operating procedure.

Developing countries have traditionally looked to the major news centers - New York, London, Paris, Moscow - for reports on happenings beyond their borders, even for news of their near neighbors. Seldom have they had the resources to maintain their own correspondents abroad. The visual news they have themselves originated often has not, in the view of Western news editors, been of sufficient technical quality to be used, or is of limited international interest.

Because the international agencies, such as the London-based Visnews, have had the experience, the technology and the financial backing for making news available on a timely basis, they have assumed the role of collecting and redistributing the news for the rest of the world.

But their dominance is being challenged today in Asia. Shinichi Ishii, NHK-Tokyo's news coordinator, explains why the Western-oriented agencies fail to meet the need. "News coverage of Asian countries is limited, and what is provided is expensive." More importantly, these international agencies offer

news from a Western perspective. "What is needed is more regional news, news that has been gathered by Asians."

Asiavision grew out of UNESCO-sponsored symposia on more effective utilization of Intelsat and the regional satellite systems. The promotion of visual news exchanges, especially among Third World nations, was a priority item.

The first of the visual news exchanges outside those controlled by the superpowers was begun in 1982 under the sponsorship of the Organisation Internationale de Radiodiffusion et Television. ORIT, a consortium of Eastern European countries including Bulgaria, Czechoslavia, the German Democratic Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and the USSR, is based in Prague.

The service, called Intervision, was begun as a means for exchanging television programs using the Interputnik network of the USSR. Since Intervision participants are also members of the Interputnik network, news items transmitted via Intelsat from London to Moscow may be relayed via Interputnik to Intervision countries. Cuba, Yugoslavia, Australia and Finland were particpants as well.

In March 1983 a news exchange was tried involving the regional coordinating centers of the Asian Broadcasting Union, Tokyo and Kuala Lumpur, the Arab States Broadcasting Union in Kuwait, and the URTNA center in Algiers.

UNESCO had divided Asia into three zones, grouping countries in such a way as to account for size of country, geographic proximity, and time differences. Zone A included the Peoples Republic of China, the Republic of Korea, the Commonwealth of

Australia, the Dominion of New Zealand, Hong Kong and Japan. Tokyo was designated the coordinating center.

Zone B consisted of the countries of the ASEAN region, Malaysia, Brunei, the Kingdom of Thailand, the Philippines, the Republic of Singapore, and the Republic of Indonesia. Zone C had as members India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and several others, with IRIB-Iran as coordinating center.

In April 1984 Zones A and B, with somewhat altered membership, were operating once a week news exchanges. By October Zone A exchanges had increased to two a week and Zone B members were trading news on a daily basis. Some countries, such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei, exchange news with both zones, maintaining their affiliations with Visnews as well.

Emergence of these "consentual exchanges" has several implications. They address the perceived problems of Western domination of the news by making available for use greater amounts of news collected by Asians for Asians. Dependencies on outside coverage and foreign reporting of local and events is thereby lessened.

In this case, the satellite has brought the means for the peoples of Asia, no matter how different their socio-economic-political orientations, to be in touch with each other on a daily basis, and have access to programming that is a natural part of the culture it represents. On the evening news, Indians may see Sri Lankans as Sri Lankans see themselves, in everyday surroundings.

These exchanges have also improved the production quality, if not the variety of news shown locally - in part because of the

improved training provided by the ABU and others but also because of the changed perception that news locally collected is not just for local consumption.

The satellite network has opened for the first time the possibility for coproduction of programs. Although instances of such activity seems at the moment limited to sporting events, cooperative programming and sharing of costs is inevitable. Arab states, with a common language and a regional satellite system, are thought to be prime candidates for testing this concept. Asia, with greater diversity, will in its own way embark on transnational programming creating its own genre and market.

In summary, the television news exchanges of Asia have added to the "many voices" called for in the McBride Report. By creating networks of cooperation, based on self-reliance and mutual-assistance, these countries are discovering that rather than being passive consumers they can be active contributors to the world's news.